

Yonkers Public Library  
Northeast corner of Nepperhan Avenue  
and South Broadway  
Yonkers  
Westchester County  
New York

HABS No. NY-6144

HABS  
NY,  
60-4015,  
5-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
MID-ATLANTIC REGION NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

YONKERS PUBLIC LIBRARY

HABS No. NY-6144

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Location: Northeast corner of intersection of Nepperhan Avenue and Broadway, Yonkers, Westchester, New York

Present Owner: New York State Department of Transportation.

Present Use: Abandoned, slated for Demolition in 1982.

Significance: The Yonkers Library Building was built by the City upon the receipt of a Carnegie donation of \$50,000, and so is a part of the physical evidence of that worldwide benefaction. It is an example of a stylistic trend in architecture during the first decade of our Twentieth Century towards less flamboyant, more historically correct massing and detailing.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date(s) of Erection:

The Library Building was constructed from 1902 to 1904.

2. Architect:

The architects for the new Library Building were Edwin A. Quick and his son, H. Lansing Quick, who designed most of the large scale structures in Yonkers at the turn of the century and the years following, including the Yonkers Exchange Building for the New York Telephone Company, the Oak Street firehouse, a series of four banks on South Broadway just north of the library site, and the new City Hall in 1910.

3. Original and Subsequent Owners:

The City of Yonkers has owned the Library Building since its construction until it was vested by the State of New York on September 8, 1971.

4. Alterations and Additions:

One interior alteration of the Library Building should be recognized as a reminder of the impact of the social and economic policies of the New Deal. On the second floor of the

building, the main apsidal space was designed as an auditorium. Three shallow lunettes were included in the original interior detailing of the auditorium, one above the rostrum at the center rear of the apse, and one over each of the sliding walls which lead into the two small reading rooms at either end of the building. When the auditorium became the Childrens Library in the 1930's, decorations were desired in keeping with the new purpose of the space.

In 1934 Mr. David Hutchinson, a local Yonkers artist, was engaged through the W. P. A. Federal Arts Project to paint a mural for the central lunette. The painting, showing a jousting scene from "Ivanhoe" in an illustrative manner, reminiscent of, but less robust than, the paintings of N. C. Wyeth, is on canvas mounted on a wood frame.

The second painting, also on canvas, was done in 1935, and shows a group of Indians on the hill which is now Washington Park, looking out at the "Half Moon", small upon the wide bosom of the river which would bear Hudson's name. The Federal Arts Project paid for the original sketches for this work, the library picked up the tab for oils, canvas and wood, and Mr. Hutchinson contributed his time to the project.

The third lunette was decorated in 1936 and celebrated "Invention" with illustrations of famous men in science and industry seen pondering their creations. Among the fifteen inventors shown are two with special impact upon the City of Yonkers, Mr. Elijah Grey Otis, inventor of the elevator, and Mr. Halycon Skinner, inventor/perfector of the axminster and moquette looms. In the absence of the funding, the painter contributed ideas, materials and time to complete this painting, and then left Yonkers to run a chicken farm near Danbury, Connecticut.

Since these three paintings, one of a straight illustrative nature, one encouraging a contemplative response, and one hortatory, are on stretched canvas, they have been removed for future use and need not be considered integral parts of the library structure.

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

The Library is a two and one-half story building whose style is derived from French and English 18th Century prototypes.

### B. Description of Exterior:

The building plan takes the general form of a pointed oval, a marquise, inserted between the Nepperhan Avenue - Broadway intersection, and the gouged out hillside of Washington Park. The street facade, one long side of the marquise, is composed of three protruding flat bays joined by two curved forms of the main structure. As originally utilized, each of these five facade units defined an interior space, with an hierarchy of functions suggested by the importance of the facade element. The central bay contained, and still does, the entrance and stairhall, the side bays, specialized reading and reference rooms, and the curved interstices, the office and service rooms.

The entire structure rests upon an horizontally rusticated brick basement, the rest of the building being faced with smooth brick, with the exception of the decorative detailing. The building is surmounted by a continuous entablature, with an unadorned brick frieze under a row of stone details, supporting a cornice of smooth brick work, except in the center bay in which the entablature is worked in stone and is accented by a blind balustrade.

The two bays at either end of the facade are defined by quoining, and contain a set of three closely spaced windows on each of the two floors. These windows are surmounted by stone keystones carved as consoles.

Each curved facade sector has two evenly spaced windows per floor, similarly surmounted by consoles.

The center bay is marked by a lower story containing the main entrance doorway. This story continues the basement rustication pattern up to the level of the interior stair landing, mid-way between the first and second floor.

Above this rusticated level the central bay assumes a monumental single story design of three panels defined by stone ionic pilasters supporting the cornice and balustrade. The central, and wider, panel contains a single arched window surmounted by a console. The two side panels contain single rectangular windows whose heads are level with the spring of the arch of the central window. Beneath the three windows are plaques, the center in stone, the side ones incised in the brick. The spaces above two side windows are filled with round niches surrounded by wreaths and with empty name plates beneath, all executed in stone.

The returns of this central bay, thrust forward from the main body of the building, repeat the design of the two side panels, with the outer edge defined as a full return of the corner pilaster, and with a quarter pilaster marking the junction of the thrust and the main structure.

The end bay details are continued on the back of the building, i.e., the returns of the points on the marquise. These bays on this facade contain two close set windows per floor and are terminated by a set back marked by quoining.

The apsidal facade marking the exterior of the childrens library and stock rooms has the same simple detailing as the curved bays of the street facade lacking only the consoles at the window headers.

#### C. Description of Interior:

The plan displays the room layout which can read from the exterior. On each floor the end bays were designed to contain reading and research rooms for periodicals, arts, archives, etc.; the curved bays held services and offices; while the center bay was given over to circulation space - entrance, octagonal foyer, grand staircase. The main room on first floor, apsidal in form, contained book stacks arranged radially with a librarians desk in the center.

An auditorium, located within the apse of the second floor, was presently converted in the 1930s into a childrens library.

The key interior organizational device of the building is the arcaded octagonal rotunda centered at the crossing of the two main axes of the marquise shaped building. Stairs from the main entrance lead up to an archway cut into one face of the octagon bisected by the short building axis, while arches in the faces to either hand permit entry into the stairwells which lead up to the second floor. The arched openings of facing segments open into the apsidal stack room with its radially arranged stacks. The segments of the octagon bisected by the long axis of the building lead on either hand to the reading rooms in the end bays of the building.

The angles of the octagon are marked with simple pilasters from which spring the arches of each opening. The floor of the octagon is decorated with a mosaic pattern in red and white. A series of linearly arranged red tile circles lead from each pillar into a central motif at the center of the building.

Directly above this motif is a skylight set into the second floor which is lit by a similar skylight in the roof of the building.

The flaw in this seemingly logical arrangement is the disproportionate amount of space given over to circulation, as symbolized by the importance of the central circulation bay on the main facade. More than a quarter of the enclosed space is in stairs, halls and corridors.

D. Site:

The Library Building was erected at the foot of Washington Park, a steep hillside, which in the 18th Century contained the Philipse family orchard and now is crowned by City Hall. However, in 1902 when the Library Building was begun, the property was the seat of the Nesbit family, who had donated the South Broadway streetfront to the City of Yonkers.

Thus the choice of Washington Park for the site of the library seemed an appropriate one for Yonkers. Located directly across from the high school, then the library's home, the park provided an easily accessible location near downtown shopping facilities.

However, it must be pointed out that as a result of this site selection, the only interrelationship of building and surroundings is that which was forced upon the architects by the existing street patterns, as the curved facade of the building responds to the curve of Nepperhan Avenue turning into Broadway. Subsequent street widening has eliminated a flight of curved steps on the axis of the central bay, steps which originally led to the street intersection.

The building site was gouged out of the corner of Washington Park on the hill behind the library structure. No relationship was, or has been since, developed between park and building.

The City of Yonkers constructed two major government buildings in Washington Park during the first decades of the twentieth century, both designed by Edwin A. Quick and Son. Although City Hall is only a few years later in design and construction than the library, no effort seems to have been made by the architects to relate it to the older library structure. Both buildings were formulated from separate needs to suit particular situations, and their location within Washington Park creates a physical juxtaposition of differing architectural concepts. The restrained and "correctly" detailed library is in distinct contrast

to the large and imposing City Hall, with its free use of Renaissance motifs, reflecting the approach to style then fashionable in continental Europe, especially Paris.

Within the surrounding urban structure, the library is as isolated as it is from its immediate environment. It can be argued that the building had a relationship, but in plan only, with the now demolished Central Yonkers High School across Nepperhan Avenue. Since the school was in the Spanish style, and stood on top of a steep hill, the continuation of the Wahsington Park eminence, no real stylistic or three dimensional relationship was ever apparent. The site of the former high school has been proposed as the site for a new Yonkers Central Library.

In terms of the overall Yonkers urban context, the library was served at its opening, and into the early 1950's, by trolley service north-south on Broadway, and radiating several directions from Getty Square. A branch line of the old New York and Northern railway, which led into the present Putnam division of the Hudson Line of Conrail, also served Getty Square, a block from the Library Building.

There are no available historic views of the Library Building and the site.

### PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Yonkers Public Library is to be demolished as part of the Nepperhan Arterial Project, funded by the Federal Highway Administration. Under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, mititgative documentation was undertaken for the city of Yonkers in July 1981 by Francis Booth, Architect, of Tippetts-Abbett-McCarthy-Stratton (TAMS), Engineers, Architects and Planners.



